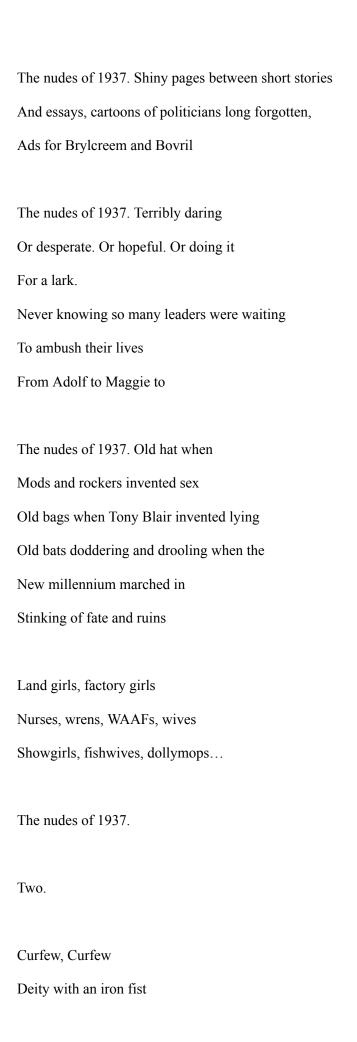
4 conflict snapshots and a call 2 arms

By Jayaprakash Satyamurthy
One.
The nudes of 1937
In crisp black & white
In Lilliput or some other
Daring but respectable little magazine
Light and shade carefully arrayed
Approaching the condition of art
Slim girls or curvy ones
Bodies that then saw the phoney war
The home front. Blitz.
Did they become land girls, factory girls
Nurses, wrens, WAAFs, wives?
Showgirls, fishwives, dollymops
None of them are with us now.
Or so few as not to be worth counting.
The nudes of 1937, flesh
Innocent of colour
In a pre-Kodachrome, prelapsarian
Oasis
Between convulsions

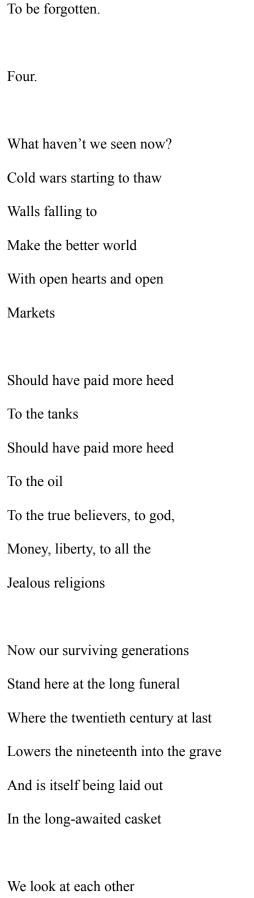


Cancelling school
Keeping me home
Reading books like I was
Starving for stories
Small me. Big words
Like 'riots'
'Communal violence'
'Curfew'
Small me drinking orange soda
Hiding behind the curtains
With a book
We left the city in '89
In '90 it burned again
That city where I'd only known
Hospitality from
Muslims or Hindus or Christians
Too small to know
Why Mother Curfew
Hovered in the sky
Blotting sun
Her strong arms crossed
Diaphanous wings
Fluttering almost faster than sight
'92 the bhakts

Smashed the old mosque

In the city where they say			
Lord Ram was born			
Newspapers like horror paperbacks			
Or world war history books			
In father's bookshelves			
Big words. Bad times.			
Time to retire the old phrases			
'Unity in diversity' 'all Indians are my brothers and sisters'			
The 90s in garden city			
Tamizh and Kannadiga fighting			
Over a river			
Great Goddess Curfew returned			
Closing college, keeping me indoors			
In the rubble left behind			
By parents' divorce			
I was			
Pulling shrapnel from			
My bones			
While everything crouched			
Sheltering from the beating			
Of her heart, her wings			
O Curfew			
Truest deity of my times			
In this year of our plague			

I beseech you
Keep us safe
Keep us whole
Be the people's goddess
Teach us not to need you
Not to need you even though
I now know if Bharat Mata
Ever had an aspect
For these times
It is you.
Three.
I am sorry the government banned tiktok
Sorry the government blacked out the internet
Sorry you don't speak that much english
And aren't blonde anyway even if some of you
Are light-eyed and light-skinned, for south asians
Sorry none of the sexy wars involved you
Just a seventy-year-old sibling rivalry
In a boring subcontinent
Sorry you're our Ireland
Sorry you're a Led Zeppelin song that has nothing to do with you
(Even though it's got one of the good riffs Page actually wrote)
Sorry you were never known well enough



The orphans and relicts at this

Moebius funeral

Wondering who has it worse

The old, who lived to see

The young, who never saw

Or we, in between,

Whose only job was to work

In the downfall?

Should have paid more heed

To the sound of thunder

Should have paid more heed

To the formula for absolution

The sod hits the wooden box

A gravedigger's job is secure

We shuffle away to the foyer

Drink the bad red wine

Size up the floral tributes

What haven't we seen now?

What haven't we seen now?

Five: To Arms

Feed another poem into the chamber

Another bullet into the booklet

This is the weapon with which I'm able.

Load another verse in the can(n)on

Light a fuse and publish it

This is the war as I can fight it

The fuse as I can light it.

Poets aren't bulletproof

And death is in love with all that live

But in love it may let slip

A verse or two

A word and some ellipses...

...Valhalla is only paper

Eternity is only ink or pixel

But in such dreams I load and reload

And keep my phrases dry

And trust in my words.